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ABSTRACT

The New Zealand National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a new qualifications, credit, and assessment system. This report explores the difference the NQF makes for young people. It is the first report of a longitudinal study that will follow two cohorts of students in seven North Island (New Zealand) high schools to see the impact the NQF has on them. This research suggests that the NQF is likely to be followed as if it were the old set of practices it was designed to replace. On the basis of responses from 49 interviews with sixth-form students, interviews with 10 teachers, and a study of documentation during 1996, research findings show the following: most students had heard of the NQF and standards-based assessment, but no student could describe the structure in any detail; about three-quarters of students could describe something about the unit standards, but none had seen an actual standards document; most students could not describe the functions of the credits in the new system, nor did they know how many they had earned nor how they related to their futures; only four students knew anything about the proposed new national certificate; most students were interested in the structure of the NQF when it was explained to them; teachers, however, were sure that students understood the new system; students had some experience with assessment under the new system, but few understood anything about the competency-based subset of standards-based assessment; nearly all students referred to assessment as synonymous with written tests; most students thought that examinations, rather than the new unit standards, would allow employers and tertiary educational institutions to identify more accurately what they knew; and most students did not see a correspondence between the unit standards they were assessed on and their future employment plans. Many changes will be required for the NQF to be implemented fully, and better communication of its aims and methods will be a necessity. (Contains 29 references.) (SLD)

ED 425 190

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A LONGITUDINAL STUDY TRACKING NINETY-EIGHT STUDENTS

The First Report of the First Cohort to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority

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Patrick Fitzsimons

A Report for the National Qualifications Authority by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research

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The First Report of the First Cohort to the
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

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New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Wellington
1997

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses the research question: what difference does the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) make for young people? This is the first-phase report of a longitudinal study which will follow 2 cohorts of students in 7 North Island schools to see what impact the NQF has on them.

The NQF is a new qualifications, credit, and assessment system. This research shows, however, that it is more likely to be implemented as if it were the old set of practices which it was designed to replace. There is widespread dual assessment where unit standards and sixth form internal assessment are "marked" separately on the same test paper with different criteria being used for each. Students report that unit standard assessment practices mimic the old practices. There were instances where unit standard assessment practices were integrated with the achievement-based assessment; in such instances performance criteria were counted and students given a percentage mark for the internal assessment for sixth form. Assessment was experienced as tests by students, and most of the tests were written. This raises questions about sufficiency of evidence. There are many variations in the ways in which reassessment is carried out, which raises issues of fairness and validity, which in turn creates questions about standardisation. Over all, despite the information supplied to schools by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the amount students were told about the NQF, standards-based assessment, and the reasons for the changes, the students lacked knowledge.

On the basis of responses from 49 interviews with sixth form students, interviews with 10 teachers, and a study of documentation during 1996, the research findings are set out below.

The Structure of the NQF

(a) Most students had heard about the NQF and standards-based assessment, but no student could describe the structure in any detail.
(b) About three-quarters of students could describe something about unit standards.
(c) No student had seen an actual unit standard document.
(d) Most students could not describe any of the various functions of credits, nor could any of them state accurately how many they had earned or how the credits related to their future.
(e) Only 4 students knew anything about the proposed new national certificate.
(f) Most students were interested in the structure of the NQF when it was explained to them.
(g) Teachers were sure that students understood the new system.

Assessment Issues

(a) Assessment was one feature of the NQF with which most students now had some experience.
(b) Few students knew anything about the competency-based subset of standards-based assessment.
(c) All students were familiar with the achievement-based version of standards-based assessment.
(d) Many students referred to a dual system of assessment consisting of unit standards combined with sixth form assessment.
(e) A few students said they favoured unit standards over examinations: most, however, preferred examinations.
(f) Nearly all students interviewed referred to assessment as synonymous with written tests.
(g) A unit standard could be reassessed as many times as required to "pass".
(h) Reassessment also took the form of written tests.
(i) About half of the students expressed concern at the large amount of assessment they were undergoing.
(j) Many students wanted percentage marks or achievement grades instead of a pass/fail assessment.
(k) Many students wanted recognition for the level of success they had achieved even though they had not achieved all the elements in the unit standard.
(l) About one-quarter rejected standards-based assessment on the grounds of what they described as "the criteria" (performance criteria).
(m) Student responses suggested that an insufficient variety of evidence is being collected to have confidence that assessment is valid—assessments are mostly tests.
(n) Student responses do not indicate any volunteering of evidence on their part for assessment.

Student Choices

(a) Most students thought that examinations, rather than unit standards, would allow employers and tertiary educational institutions to identify more accurately what they knew.
(b) Most students did not see a correspondence between the unit standards they were assessed on and their future employment plans.
(c) Most students reported little help from the careers guidance system in their schools in relation to choices of study and their thinking about future employment.

Sources of Information

(a) There is a gap between the provision of "information" about the NQF and its subsequent internalisation by students as "knowledge".
(b) The most important source of information for students seems to be classroom teachers.
(c) Although students said careers teachers spoke regularly at school assemblies about "the qualifications", most students could not recall much of what had actually been said. Since attendance at assemblies is compulsory, it could be expected that most students would have been presented with information at some time.
(d) Only 5 students reported that they had discussed the unit standards with their parents.

INTRODUCTION

Background

This is the first phase report of a longitudinal study which will follow 2 cohorts of students in 7 North Island schools to see what impact the NQF has on them. The rationale for the study is that the NQF should have an impact in a number of areas:

(a) choice of curriculum area, and routes to qualifications;
(b) qualification choices;
(c) employment; and,
(d) attitudes towards competency, skill, effort, and reward.

Interviews with the students are the centrepiece of the study, and are analysed in the context of information from their schools and parents, to understand better the full environment which has contributed to their understanding of the qualifications framework, and their processes of choice, decision making, and formation of, and changes of, attitude.

Research Questions

The following questions guide the research:

1. How do students' perceptions of the NQF change as they move through the school system, and into tertiary education, employment, and parenthood?
2. How do students' attitudes towards skill development and performance change as a result of their experience of the unit standards-based assessment which is key to the NQF?
3. Do students experience a match between the options offered by the NQF and the guidance systems in their schools?
4. How helpful are school guidance systems and agencies such as Careers New Zealand, the Education and Training Support Agency (ETSA), and the New Zealand Employment Service in steering students to useful qualifications?
5. Is there any change in attitude towards competencies, lifelong learning, and qualifications with employment experience?
6. Do students moving to tertiary institutions report any disjuncture between their school experience of assessment and attitudes towards proof of performance and competency, and their experience in the tertiary institution?
7. Do students moving to employment report any disjuncture between their school experience of assessment and attitudes towards proof of performance and competency, and their experience

in employment?

8. Do the NQF principles of flexibility and per/formance-based assessment provide motivation for those who cannot find work to develop more marketable skills, and/or provide them with more confidence in seeking employment or social contribution opportunities?

Report Format

- This report on the first phase describes sixth form students' perceptions of the NQF. It describes first the 7 schools in which the interviews with the students took place.
- Second, it addresses the structure of the NQF from the point of view of the NZQA and this is then juxtaposed with the responses of the students in an attempt to show where there is convergence between the 2 views and where there are gaps still to be addressed—and there are many.
- Third, the impact of credit accumulation and transfer is examined in a similar manner and with similar results—an almost complete lack of understanding by students.
- Next, the report investigates the central component of the NQF in schools, that is, standards-based assessment. Because the management of the change in assessment is critical to the success of the NQF, this is the most detailed section. The information presented here shows wide variations in assessment practices between schools and within schools as well. Several important questions are raised, and once again student knowledge is lacking.
- Fifth, the role of teachers as assessors is discussed. According to the information from students, teachers seem to have taken the new assessment on as additional work over and above internal assessment rather than using the new assessment to explore how schools might function differently.
- Sixth, the ways in which the NQF is designed to impact on the future of students is compared with what the students hypothesise about its value for them; for most students, the NQF is not prominent.
- Finally, on the basis of the analysis, a number of general policy implications of the study so far are outlined, the most critical of which are that the NQF is unlikely to succeed while dual assessment continues.
- The conclusion is that students have very limited perceptions of the NQF and its wider purposes; the existing national qualifications are more real to them. But it is, after all, early days for the NQF.

The research is funded by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), but the analysis in this report does not necessarily reflect the official position of the NZQA.

THE SCHOOLS

The 7 Schools

Seven secondary schools were selected in consultation with NZQA staff. The sample of schools was drawn from those in the Auckland-Waikato region which were known to have made progress with the implementation of the NQF. The sample of schools covers the socioeconomic spectrum.

The researcher conducted interviews with 49 sixth form students from 7 schools. As far as possible, the students were selected by the schools after discussion with the researcher to give as representative a sample of their students as possible. This meant that the students came from varying social backgrounds and from diverse ethnic groups in New Zealand. The selected students were required to have had some experience of standards-based assessment, a condition that was met by all but 5 students. These students were from schools "A" and "F" where the unit standards were limited during 1996 to subjects the students had not chosen.

All the teachers spoken to in the schools in the study expressed the hope that the NQF would succeed, but in general, as the conversation went on, their reservations became obvious. There was some discussion with principals and senior teachers about the "freeze", initiated by the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (NZPPTA), which had slowed down the implementation of the NQF. They said this introduced a degree of difficulty into their efforts to convince some teachers whom they described as already "sceptical" about the value of the NQF.

Assessment policy varies widely between schools, and its implementation also varies within schools between departments, and between teachers in the same department. It was often hard to find the policy documents reflected in what students said of their own experience and knowledge. Some schools offer considerable documentation; in others, information is scant and very difficult to retrieve. One teacher suggested a reason for this might be that because things changed so rapidly, there was not much use seen in collating it.

The following thumbnail sketches of the seven schools include a general description; their socioeconomic decile ratings; whether they are urban or rural; their ethnic and gender composition; unit standards offered during 1996; and any notable school policy information. All schools are accredited by the NZQA.

School A

This is an urban secondary school for boys with a decile rating of 4 with 1100 students. The ethnic composition is 40 percent Pakeha, 30 percent Pacific Island, and 30 percent Asian. The Minister of Education recently congratulated the school on being the national leader in its socioeconomic group using a range of key educational indicators such as the results of School Certificate and

University Bursaries examinations and the attainments of school leavers. The school was noted in its brochure as "proving to be an excellent return on the investment that has been made in it by the Government". During 1996 it offered unit standards in history, geography, physics, chemistry and biology, mathematics, and some ETSA Skill Pathways subjects.

School B

This is a medium-sized, urban, coeducational secondary school that has a decile ranking of 5. It has a large Community Education programme. The school regards the NQF as a valuable structure for its students because a large number of those in the senior school are thought to be non-university in their orientation. The ethnic composition is mainly Pakeha, with about 10 percent Maori, and 8 percent Asian. Sixteen percent of the school's leavers went to university and a further 35 percent gained places in tertiary training programmes. During 1996, the school offered the following unit standards: chemistry, physics, biology, general science, history, geography, communications, mathematics, food handling, and core "generics" of CV writing and job-seeking skills. Skill Pathways was also offered.

School C

This large urban school is coeducational and multicultural. It has a decile rating of 3. The school offers conventional school subjects as well as subjects in 22 of what it calls "vocational industry" areas. Half the school's students are from Pacific Island groups. Sixteen percent of the school's leavers went to university and a further 35 percent gained places in tertiary training programmes. Special programmes exist for students who have English as a second language, and the school offers a bilingual programme for Maori students. The school recently received a glowing review from the Education Review Office (ERO) which says the school is well managed, there are no major issues for the attention of the board of trustees, and provision for the NQF is a feature.

School D

This is a small, coeducational, rural secondary school with a decile ranking of 2. Many students are Maori, the rest are Pakeha. The unit standards offered during 1996 were physics, industrial engineering, furniture making, and design technology. During 1996, most students doing unit standards were described as "the lower academics" (DT2).[1] The retention rate of 1996 sixth formers of lower academic ability was low: the students often moved on to local private training providers. One teacher thought that this attrition rate was affected by the lack of suitable unit standards being offered. Local employment opportunities are minimal; as a result, the school expects many students to return after their time at the private providers and when the more vocationally oriented unit standards offered there do not get them a job.

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[1] This code refers to a teacher represented by "T" in school "D". References to students will also give the school code first.

School E

This is a large urban school for girls with a decile rating of 3. It has a mixed ethnic composition with a substantial Pacific Island group. With 75 contributing schools, it has a special need for social integration among students. The school works in close liaison with tertiary institutions and some industries and employers for the delivery of sections of the curriculum. These are likely to have a greater input to career-related unit standards as the school expands the number offered. The school has accreditation for all general education unit standards within the NQF up to, and including, level 4. It also has accreditation for some unit standards up to, and including level 3, on the NQF, within the fields of business and financial services, community and social services, health, recreation, computing, core generic, humanities, the service sector, manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. The school also offers Skill Pathways into which it tracks students who are not considered academic.

School F

This is a large, city, secondary school for girls with a decile ranking of 9. Its ethnic composition is largely Pakeha with a substantial Asian group. During 1996 the school offered unit standards in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and history. The school has an emphasis on academic success and has a restrictive enrolment policy as it is oversubscribed.

School G

This is a coeducational urban secondary school with a decile rating of 2 and a medium-to-large roll. The ethnic composition is mixed with a slight dominance of Pakeha. The school offered close on 60 unit standards in 1996. It professes a philosophy of continuous improvement. A recent ERO report states that the school provides a quality learning environment with a notably positive tone at both school and classroom levels, and that results in external examinations and in many other areas indicate that "student achievement is generally above what could reasonably be expected".

Refusals

Two other schools which were approached initially declined to take part. One deputy principal explained:

> The argument we are having today is that we think competent teachers are being distracted into this framework. We are an academic school. We still believe that the whole system is designed to bring incompetents (teachers and students) up to the competent level. In other words if you were teaching English and you wanted to learn to read, write and speak better, then meeting funny little NZQA aims and assessment objectives and filling in boxes is stopping teachers actually getting on with their business of involving kids in language in such a way that they improve. . . . We still have a vague hope that it will fall over. We've never gone into these funny little private exams or the alternative school sixth form exam—we have never looked at any of those sorts of things. We would have a look at them again if enough schools got together and started promoting that as the standards. But we're not doing that at the moment.

The other school declined on the basis of supporting the NQF "freeze" promoted by the NZPPTA. These 2 schools were replaced by 2 schools with equivalent decile ratings.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

> *What we have been able to do in the Authority is bring all the elements together into one coherent package* (Hood, 1994b, p. 135).

The Policy Context

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been developed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), a body established by the Education Act 1989, s.253 (1) which states that, amongst other things, a key function of the NZQA is:

> "To develop a framework for national qualifications in secondary schools . . . in which—
>
> " (i) All qualifications . . . have a purpose and a relationship to each other that students and the public can understand; and
> "(ii) there is a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications, with recognition of competency already achieved."

The NQF is designed to enable the classification of all education and training qualifications into one of 8 levels ranging from level 1 at year 11 at secondary school to postgraduate qualifications at level 8. Levels 1 and 8 are said to be open ended "while the intervening six levels are meant to be hierarchical, separate and of increasing complexity while corresponding to approximately one year's worth of study by mainstream (career path) students" (Wagner & Sass, 1992, p. 18).

This is a radical departure from what existed previously in New Zealand—

> Qualifications act as a form of currency in society, and particularly in the labour market. That currency had become progressively confused in New Zealand. Many qualifications did not link well with one another; the value of some qualifications was in doubt; holders of qualifications were not always as proficient as their qualification suggested; there were no consistent regulations in place to establish values on a systems-wide basis. Instead there was a qualifications 'stagflation', a plethora of certifying and examining agencies, overlapping terminology and many subtle (and not so subtle) barriers to the attainment of the currency (Barker, 1995, p. 15–16).

and there were:

> more than 50 different . . . bodies involved in the qualifications field. These bodies often used markedly different systems to assess and recognise knowledge and skills, even in similar areas. Three different systems operated at the upper secondary school level alone. (Hood, 1996, p. 181).

The features of the NQF are:

> clearly specified learning outcomes—which explain what the learner knows and can do; quality assurance—to ensure that providers and assessors can deliver what they say they can; defined levels and credits—to provide a basis to increase flexibility and portability for learners (Hood, Kerr, & Perris, 1996, p. 1).

The goals for the NQF include:

> a single comprehensive and integrated qualifications structure, which is flexible and responsive, widely and easily accessible, and is informed by both labour market requirements and educational requirements (Hood *et al.*, 1996, p. 1).

The NQF is designed to provide a consistent and logical application of the nomenclature for qualifications, to enable learning to be recognised in a consistent way, and to give recognition to the importance of generic and portable, transferable skills. For this, the NQF will need to:

> provide flexible access to learning, assessment and credit opportunities. This means reorganising in order to provide a range of new services such as recognition of prior learning (especially for 'non-traditional' learners), action planning, individual learning programmes, assessment on demand, records of achievement, work-based learning and workplace assessment, facilitating access where necessary to a range of providers (Martin, 1993, p. 9).

The NQF is also seen as "merely a tool designed to respond to a set of intersecting pressures" (Barker, 1995) which are:

> Student demands which derive from their role as purchasing consumers; government demands where government is an indirect consumer purchasing for society; the demands of employers who, as end users of qualifications, have either a direct or indirect purchasing interest in the system (p. 20).

The NQF "challenges traditional thinking and practices about how people learn, who can learn, and where learning should take place" (Hood, 1994b, p. 2), and is said to have "the potential to change the culture of New Zealand" (Hood, 1994a, p. 137). The NZQA has confirmed that in secondary schools "the Qualifications Framework will change the current underlying school structure with the shift in emphasis from course-based learning to student-centred learning" (Martin, 1993, p. 9). There is, then, a legislated mandate to change the culture of secondary schools and, as a consequence, the culture of New Zealand.

What Students Know About the Structure

It was an expectation of the research that students would have, even at this early stage of the new system, some knowledge of a qualifications structure that is expected to change their school life and their culture, and that will affect their life chances. The students were interviewed about what they knew about the NQF, its various elements, and purposes. They were invited to talk about:

- what they had been told about the NQF,
- what the sources of that information were,
- what their experience has been so far,
- what value they thought the NQF would be to them in future education and employment, and
- how the qualifications they wanted to achieve might fit on to the NQF.

About half of the students interviewed had some familiarity with key elements of the NQF. When asked what they knew about the NQF, students said:

> With unit standards you can do your training in less time and then you can work on other things (C3).

> I know that you have to log on to a national computer or something first up before you can earn any qualification. With each module you complete or pass you get a unit and if you don't pass you can go back and do that module again. You can complete units at a different school (D4).

> We get modulated [moderated]. It's something like scaling (G3).

> You do sections of the course and as you do those sections you get passed. It gets put in a big computer and it's in Wellington I think. They just accumulate it and they get put into a bit of paper. It's a lot easier for a lot more people to get qualifications that way (D1).

> I think it's because some people don't stay for the whole year and if somebody wants the qualification they can just go for the one that they need and if they have to leave they've still got something to prove that they've done a little bit (D4).

> We usually sit this little exam and if you get more than half way, you will get the unit standard (C6).

Some students had only a limited knowledge or had forgotten what they had been told.

> I haven't really been told much about it. Unless you were thinking of doing that subject, they didn't really tell you about it (D1).

> [I don't know] a heck of a lot really. Just what we have done in class— performance criteria (A7).

Even though their knowledge was limited, these students knew:

- the idea of a framework,
- its provision for portability of qualifications,
- the idea of small units of work,
- the opportunity for reassessment,
- the storage of personal records of learning, and
- there were performance criteria that had to be 100 percent correct before the award of the standard.

What Students Know About the New Qualifications

Only 4 students were able to respond accurately to questions about the names of the new qualifications, that is, the National Certificate, the National Diploma, and Degrees.

> It looks that I am doing better at the administration and communication in *National Certificate* subjects (E3).

> They give us an outline of the assignments and they say which parts are for *National Certificate*. One for sixth form and one for *National Certificate*. Then they tell us whether we passed or not (G6).

These students are touching on an important area because their credits ought to be recognised if, or when, they enrol at a tertiary (or other) provider.

THE IMPACT OF CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER

> *A credit indicates how long it would take a 'typical' learner to complete a unit standard* (NZQA, 1996, p. 59).

Why Have Credits?

The NZQA has developed the idea of "credits" to facilitate the portability of qualifications within a "seamless" education system where:

> students can move freely from institution to institution while continuing to build a national qualification, and those learning on the job in the workplace gain credits towards national qualifications (Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 6).

The number of credits available in each unit standard is published as part of the unit standard format, and its value is expressed in terms of numbers of credits gained as a result of achieving the standard (e.g., "this unit standard is worth 10 credits"). The term "credit" is used in a variety of ways. Industry training organisations (ITOs) have a funding measure for purchasing courses which they call the standard training measure (STM) where "one standard training measure equates to 120 NQF credits" (ETSA, 1995). Some employment contracts include skills-based pay in which increases in individual remuneration are related to the credits acquired on the NQF. Credits are used to assign value to uncredentialled learning for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Credit transfer allows credentialled learning to be assessed for "equivalence" between institutional programmes.

Credits also provide the New Zealand Ministry of Education with a device to calculate and manage the funding of education institutions on a time-related basis. However, a standards-based structure does not require a time base, merely an appropriate performance. The NZQA has attempted to resolve this conceptual contradiction by introducing the notion of the "hypothetical average student" (1990, p. 19) for whom one credit equates to 10 hours of teacher-directed activity.

> The credit indicates how long it would take the typical learner to complete the unit standard. One credit equates to about 10 hours of work. . . . It is an agreed value only and not a time limit for the performance to be achieved. . . . individual learners will be able to earn any number of credits within a learning programme (NZQA, 1996, p. 59).

The National Diploma, for example, is 120 credits which is 1200 hours of course time, that is, the Equivalent Full-Time Student (EFTS). The Ministry's funding for EFTS (120 credits for a fulltime course) is based on course duration and student attendance.

The idea of credit accumulation and transfer is, however, not new.

> Few policies in higher education over the past 30 years have been pursued more assiduously by government, or been endorsed more readily by the principal parties, than proposals to ease credit transfer and the accumulative achievement of students (Robertson, 1996, p. 55).

Although credits are not new, they are integral to recently introduced consumer-oriented modes of education, and, as such, the following observation about credits would, in theory, apply in New Zealand.

> Credit transfer could also be a means of shifting the balance in the market for educational qualifications away from the supplier towards the consumer. A student who is essentially committed to completing a course, subject to severe penalties, even before embarking on it, has far less influence over the course content than one who can take his or her fees elsewhere if the course fails to meet expectations. Indeed it is at least arguable that it is the credit system which has really made possible the unique, consumer-oriented quality of American education (Fulton, 1981, p. 28).

The Meaning of a Credit

According to a recent joint publication (ETSA/NZQA, 1996, p. 2), there are now 126,000 learners "hooked" on the framework and they have earned 2.3 million credits. Credits then, are important to the NQF and its implementation but they have a variety of functions which have been assigned a range of meanings including:

- a means for transferring credits between qualifications and different institutions (NZQA, 1996);
- equating to 10 hours of "teacher-directed activity" (NZQA, 1990, p. 19);
- equating to 10 hours of "work" (by the student) but also not 10 hours of work[2] (NZQA, 1996, p. 59);
- an agreed value only (NZQA, 1996, p. 59)—(i.e., a social construct);
- a device with which to calculate the funding of institutions on an EFTS basis (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 2);

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[2] Even if the value of 10 hours for each credit varies according to its explanation, the relationship between time and credits still holds. A question then seems to arise, how can 10 hours of teacher-directed activity (which equals one credit) be completed in less than 10 hours in the interests of the efficiency that neoclassical economic theory claims to encourage? What then does this say about the notion of standard (and therefore credit) in the unit standard? There also appears to be a problem when a notion of a hypothetical average student is employed by neoliberal policies that are themselves underpinned by individualistic, competitive, and non-averaged notions of the student. Individualistic competition is about idiosyncrasy and not "averageness".

- a formula for measuring of the size of a unit standard (NZQA, 1996, p. 59);
- a form of currency (NZQA, 1990, p. 10) [but one which has no corresponding notion of debit];
- 120 credits equate to one standard training measure for ETSA purchasing (ETSA, 1995);
- a means of students exercising and increasing their consumer choices (Fulton, 1981; NZQA, undated, p. 9; Hood, 1995, p. 2; Robertson, 1996);
- no credit for partial success or failure (NZQA, 1996, p. 3);
- a measure of the accumulated national human capital with 2.3 million credits "earned" so far (ETSA/NZQA, 1996, p. 2);
- as a personal numerical accumulation of the human capital of the student which is taken to be evidence of learning (NZQA, 1996, p. 59).

As a result of this multiplicity of meanings, the credit accumulation and transfer function of the NQF may prove difficult for young people to understand, let alone identify with.

The Response from the Schools

One school in the study reported that students in the fifth form attempted a range of unit standards, and it was found that, although many students had achieved many performance criteria, no student had actually gained a credit—that is, no student had achieved a unit standard for any of the work. The school then worked out how many performance criteria each student had "passed" and awarded them a percentage mark for that particular school certificate subject on the basis of the proportion passed. This indicated that teachers are attempting to adapt the standards-based assessment to the more familiar mode of achievement-based assessment, a use for which for the NQF was never intended.

> We have got 43 kids who have done these unit standards in one group here and none of them got all the performance criteria, so none of them could be given the credits. What we did was add up the percentage each kid got right and gave them that mark [for School Certificate] (CT2).

Sixth Form Certificate has total internal assessment. Grades for all schools are awarded on a 1-to-9 scale with the grade allocation for each particular school based on its own performance in School Certificate results from the previous year. In the School Certificate assessment practices outlined by the teacher in School "C" above, students had their performance criteria aggregated to gain the percentage mark in School Certificate. This affects the grade allocation for the sixth form and misuse of the NQF is thus compounded.

Student Responses

> When learners have achieved credit, they should know immediately. If they have not achieved credit, they should know the areas of deficiency (NZQA, 1996, p. 49).

Five students associated credits with unit standard elements, but the rest did not know anything about credits. Many students said they had passed some elements but could not say how many or which unit standards or credits they had accumulated.

> The teachers just tell you the credits the elements or the numbers or whatever you get, and how many credits, but I can't remember (E5).

> You don't get all the points if you don't get all of them right. We have got credits and unit standards and if we do some work and we get so much right, we get a credit. That is about all I know (C7).

> I think she just told us that most of the subjects might lead into the workforce. You can continue doing them when you're working and you have to pass elements to get credits and we can get like about 40 credits a year or something (E2).

> These unit standards are all a bit confusing to me at this stage. I'm not sure what the difference between credits and unit standards is; if you get credits that go towards unit standards or unit standards that go towards credits. I think we have a few in chemistry and biology (G6).

Two students thought that credits were connected with further education. The first suggested that the unit standards are not for academic students.

> Because I don't know that much about it and the plans I had for my future are mainly needing to get bursary to get into Law school. I won't be going to polytechnic or trying to gain credits and stuff (E2).

> In this brochure it's got 320 points to get into the university. So I think if we have unit standards next year it shouldn't be hard at all to get the 320 credits because you get a retry all the time (D2).

This last student does not understand that 320 credits, at 10 hours per credit, equates to 3200 hours (i.e., approximately 3 years) of either "teacher-directed activity" or "work".

The student responses are indicative of the generally low level of knowledge about the NQF displayed throughout the interviews. Such a low level of knowledge implies a low level of felt ownership. The NZQA believes that involvement with knowledge by students in assessment is important if they are to gain full value out of the new qualifications and assessment system.

No student had a print-out of their record of learning nor had any of them heard of such a thing. Clearly they could not access their record. Although on a national level there are 2.3 million credits, they do not feature in the lives of their owners.

Only 5 students reported that they had discussed the unit standards with their parents. One student reported that the discussion consisted of her complaint to her parents.

> I told them I didn't get a level 5 standard because my handwriting did not have an impact. I only got level 4 because my writing didn't have an impact. Level 4 is exactly the same thing as level 5 except level 5 has 'impact' (E1).

Another student indicated differences in assessment procedures between subject areas.

> I found them frustrating. If you really didn't understand what it was, then you lost this big huge unit standard. The teacher would be trying to explain it as much as she could but if you don't understand then you can't get it. The way that they set it up like in biology, I found quite good. But history, it was terrible because there are lots of little things, it is not all straightforward and I hated it (F7).

The Response from Parents

With F7's knowledge, her mother was questioned separately to check her ideas about the impact of the NQF.

> Well the kids all seem quite bewildered about it. F7 has got every unit standard that she possibly could, but for some of the kids it has just been a total non-event. Unit standards happen no matter what they do. F7 puts a lot of effort into them but out of all her friends, she is about the only one that I would think is really putting the effort into it and gives it any credibility (FP1).

The support of parents is vital to the success of their children's education. If parents do not understand the structure and purposes of the NQF, any support they can give them with respect to the NQF is undermined. Since students' lives are inextricably bound up with that of their families, the impact of the NQF on parents requires further investigation.

THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT

> *Learners must understand the assessment process and the criteria to be applied. They can contribute to planning, ensure that they are getting the most out of the system and establish that their work is authentic* (NZQA, 1996, p. 55).

A "New" Approach

The NZQA has introduced a new approach to assessment through the NQF which is aimed at developing and maintaining a fair assessment system which measures achievement against clearly stated standards. The NZQA explains that:

> the Qualifications Framework removes many of the constraints and assumptions of previous assessment systems . . . The form of standards-based assessment used in the Qualifications Framework provides a new way to evaluate student performance against unit standards that represent nationally agreed levels of performance (1996, p. 1).

The system is designed to give "the assessment of a wider range of attributes than has been possible through written, time-bound tests; and the opportunity to assess for credit in a wider range of contexts whether in the workplace or in the classroom" (NZQA, 1996, p. iii). The assessment is neither norm-referenced "nor is it about setting beforehand the quota of people who are to pass or fail" (NZQA, undated, p. 13). The evidence must be valid, authentic, and sufficient.

> Valid evidence is evidence that most directly relates to the standards that are being assessed. . . . Authentic evidence must clearly belong to the individual being assessed. . . . Evidence is sufficient when an assessor is sure that the quantity of the evidence collected enables a confident and consistent decision about the award of credit (NZQA, undated, pp. 13–14).

An assessment is regarded as fair by the NZQA when the conditions of validity, authenticity, and sufficiency have been fulfilled. The Authority also points out that a fair assessment requires that:

> people are provided with clear information about standards, assessment events and procedures, assessment is free of gender, ethnic or other biases, people with special needs are appropriately accommodated, people have opportunities to undertake further assessment if required standards are not met, and people have access to appeal procedures (NZQA, undated, p. 14).

Standards-based Assessment

Peddie (1992) distinguishes 2 main types of assessment: norm-referenced and standards-based. A norm-referenced system compares individual students' performance with others, resulting in some form of ranking, for example, percentiles. Standards-based assessment (formerly more commonly referred to in assessment literature as criterion-referenced, *see* for example Croft, 1994, p. 5) can be divided into competency-based and achievement-based assessment. Peddie (1992) suggests that standards-based assessment is used when the measurement or outcome is assessed or analysed against some fixed criterion or level of achievement known as a "standard". Competency-based assessment occurs when a particular standard is set which candidates must reach to be judged as "competent", and therefore receive credit for the unit standard. Achievement-based assessment refers to assessment in which a number of progressively more demanding standards are used and in which all learner achievement is reported, usually in the form of a number or letter grade.

> Although it is likely that a competency-based measure will be the choice of the National Standards Body, there would seem to be some good arguments in favour of an achievement-based measure. This suggestion relates to the whole notion of 'credit' for a unit, which is currently awarded on an all-or-nothing basis. In turn this means that in both an achievement and a competency-based measure, there must be a point at which the learner is said to have succeeded in the unit ('passed'), and can thus be awarded the three credits available (Peddie, 1992, p. 43).

The NZQA developed the unit standard which is a statement in outcome terms expressed in a standardised format and registered on the NQF database. The 2 key ingredients of a unit standard are elements and performance criteria. Elements (outcomes) are statements of competence (intellectual, practical, or attitudinal) to be demonstrated by the learner. Performance criteria are statements which specify the standards to which the activity has to be performed and for which evidence must be gathered.

The elements and associated performance criteria form a single entity and, according to the NZQA, they should be considered as one entity. The other parts of the unit standard format are: a unique title, a stated level and credit value, sub-filed identification, statement of purpose, entry information, accreditation options, moderation options, and special notes.[3]

The full definition of a standard includes the unit standard that is registered on the NQF, the accreditation and moderation requirements, best assessment practices, and assessment exemplars (NZQA, undated, p. 3). For standards-based assessment:

> evidence is evaluated against written criteria; the criteria are expressed in a format called standards; the criteria are interpreted with the aid of external moderation; either the

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[3] Units to be registered on the NQF must follow rules of grammatical expression—there is no provision for equivalent information to be expressed in a different mode. All elements are to be expressed in the following format: "an *active verb* stating what is done, then the *object* . . . then any *conditions*" (NZQA, 1992, p. 4). All performance criteria are to be expressed in the following format: "*noun* plus *verb* plus *quality statement*" (NZQA, 1992, p. 4).

> evidence meets the criteria in the unit standard or not; and everyone who reaches the standard gets a credit (NZQA, 1996, p. 6).

Three New Zealand commentators argue that the use of performance criteria amounts to "criterion-referenced" assessment.

> It is clear that with criterion referenced assessment the major emphasis is on the learning needs of the students and that 'assessment should be focused on the individual students rather than comparisons between students' (Codd, McAlpine, & Poskitt, 1995, p. 45).

Tuck (1995, p. 60) notes that unlike previous competency movements however, the NZQA "are not prepared to be tied down to narrow behavioural or task definitions of competence".

The NZQA has outlined the qualities of good assessment (1996, pp. 53–55). These are those assessments with "appropriate methods" which obtain "authentic evidence" to make "consistent judgements" through "direct evidence" and "fair methods" which are "integrated with learning", "manageable" and "open", with "systematic" collection of "sufficient evidence" to obtain "valid evidence". This is in line with assessment advice from overseas that, in order to be equitable, assessment tasks should:

> represent authentic examples of learning activities; be seen by students to be relevant and purposeful; engage students actively in producing a response and provide opportunities for them to apply their understanding as they would outside of school rather than merely reacting to a set of givens as in traditional objective testing; and be interactive and multimode to enable the full range of student capabilities (including higher order thinking and problem solving skills) to be monitored and hence fostered (Murphy, 1995, pp. 249–250).

Students were able to talk more about assessment than any other item in the interviews. They were asked what they knew about unit standards, whether they had seen a unit standard, whether they had had a standards-based assessment, what had happened in that assessment, how well they thought the assessment measured their learning, and what they thought assessment had to do with performance and skill development. Several gave positive responses.

> Unit standards would measure what you know because you know what you're studying for and it's right in front of you (C3).

> I've done a few at school. You do your work and you get assessed along the way. It's not like an exam that you do at the end of it and you fail, and you have to do the whole thing again. You just have to do each individual thing—small bits of work at a time—that sort of thing (G1).

> It's something different to what has been going on beforehand, where you earn unit standards for certain aspects and once you've got them you've got them. You can't lose them, you can only get them. There is no midway. You've got to do them all again if you fail (G2).

> I would rather do the unit standards because in the end of unit standards you're going to know everything because that's how you get the pass (D2).

There were stronger negative responses, mainly from those students who were aiming to go to university and mainly from 2 schools. The students' records were checked with their school administration which confirmed that these students would indeed be able to succeed at university studies.

> I didn't pay much attention to them [unit standards]. I went for a sixth form certificate and if I gained them I gained them and if I didn't I didn't. I have no idea how many I have got (F3).

> My friends say things like 'we will have to go and sit a unit standards test again'. They weren't very happy about having to do it (F1).

> What annoys me is that I will get a tick for something right for sixth form certificate and I will get a cross for unit standards for the same particular item. You might get some credit for actually doing some of the question in an exam, but instead, because you just haven't explained it completely right, or you have missed out a little bit for the unit standards, you don't get any credit for what you have put down. If it hasn't got everything, it is wrong. When I was told what I had missed, I felt it was just so silly that I said 'Oh God'! (E1).

> There is a whole attitude thing. It is not that important and I can't be bothered trying to pass unless you are a really keen student. The majority of students can't be bothered. I guess that is because they are in sixth form and they are going to be leaving in a year or looking at bursary (E4).

> People who aren't that good at school work like them because they think it would be heaps easier and they get heaps of goes at it (F4).

There was one negative reaction which was based on problems with face validity:[4]

> In the unit standards sometimes the way they ask the questions, they don't ask the questions very well. Some of the questions are very very long. Because I did a geography one, the first questions it was a really long one and a lot of people didn't get the credit for that, its because they didn't ask it very well I don't think (C1).

These students are all talking about assessments as tests, in contrast to what the NZQA sees as sufficient evidence such as portfolios or samples of learning activities.

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[4] Face validity refers to the idea that the way assessment looks must be appropriate to the student (Linn & Gronlund, 1990, p. 53).

> It [standards-based assessment] is hard for girls who know what they are talking about but maybe will never ever get that 100 percent because they are not perfectionists. She knows what she is talking about but doesn't have the ability to put it down on paper (E1).

This student was saying that some students she knew would rather have a grade or numerical mark than fail everything when they missed one criterion because, as she sees it, they are not "perfectionists". Even if they are not perfect (i.e., able to gain 100 percent on a unit standards-based assessment), under achievement-based assessment, they would get some recognition for their efforts. The recognition, in the form of a mark or grade, functions as a signifier of personal worth for students who made this request. About half the students talked in a similar way; they wanted a percentage mark or an alphabetical grade as a "reward" for their efforts. They attributed their worth to the mark or grade given. Standards-based assessment, however, does not have grades or marks whereas achievement-based assessment does. Most students seemed unaware that marks and grades were only available under achievement-based assessment.

School E appeared to be occupying students with unit standards until attendance requirements had been fulfilled. Teachers from 2 other schools reported similar assessment practices.

> The consensus is that unit standards are a waste of time. My sixth form marks had already been put in by 8 November and yet they introduced unit standards in the next week. Well they said, we still haven't finished—we have got unit standards. But everyone had wound down completely. They were just not doing any work in class and the teachers tried the unit standards thing. I don't think anybody got it because it involved three days of researching in class and then this three page essay, which no one did. Everyone just sat there and wrote from their notes and didn't do anything (E1).

One teacher with 25 years of teaching experience argued that the old assessment system had its drawbacks too.

> We are quite happy for example to waste a whole lot of time at the end of the year with the examination system. We have all these kids who have done all this work. We know they can do it and yet they can go off and sit this test. With the way the four term year is structured, many schools and many courses will be completed by the end of Term 3. But they will spend all of Term 4 redoing and revising and just keeping themselves up to that level until they have sat the examination. So basically for many of them, some of November and all of December is totally dead time—25 per cent of the school year wasted (DT1).

Assessments as "Tests"

> Learners should be aware of all details of the assessment plan including where, when and how assessment will occur, the nature of the evidence to be collected and the criteria against which that evidence will be judged. They should know about unit standards and understand how unit standards fit into their course of study (NZQA, 1996, p. 49).

Assessment under the NQF requires the collection of sufficient evidence which can take many forms.

> . . . a product; . . . an explanation; . . . a performance. . . . Answers to questions and solutions to problems are evidence. The best evidence is usually the most direct: if you want to know if someone knows how to conduct an experiment, get them to do it rather than just talk or write about it (NZQA, 1996, p. 4).

A student of history was the only one to mention assessment as a group process.

> We had to do a seminar and they gave us a question and we had to answer it as a group of us together, and we just gave our opinion and backed it up with facts that we have learnt. It [the assessment] just shows what we have got stored in our memory (B1).

However, many students referred to assessment as synonymous with written tests. In most cases when it was pointed out by the interviewer that assessment meant more than tests, they still talked about tests. They were asked to explain what the "tests" consisted of and how they were carried out.

> They have a lot of tests, like unit standards. You get a test on each topic (A3).

> It's just two tests based on certain topics that we had to learn (C3).

> We have only had pencil and paper tests for them. We might have assignments, but I can't remember (G5).

Students were asked if they had been involved in other types of standards-based assessments apart from tests.

> We did a video assessment by watching videos. That was quite hard because of the whole idea of watching videos, sometimes you miss bits when people are talking. That is normal, but if you missed a bit that you required for the unit standard you failed (E4).

Five students did not equate assessment with tests: teacher observations made on a field trip and an assignment in biology; practical exercises in the computer laboratory; a woodwork construction; a history topic where a group discussion was taken as evidence; and a chemistry laboratory experiment. There was no particular pattern between schools except computer use was mentioned a few times as an example of assessment other than tests.

> . . . computers were pretty good too because I had a really good teacher and she watched us for assessment (D1).

The students' descriptions of their assessments in the traditional form of written tests was discussed with 3 teachers who were responsible for the implementation of the NQF in their schools. Two of these were national subject moderators. One said that many more means of assessment than written tests were available and used in their schools.

> They would actually be talking about the unit standards. Some of the stuff would be tests where they had to do a practical test. Another would be observations and stuff like that.

> They're looking at the whole lot [assessment] as a test probably. . . . because when we're doing an assessment the kids will know the day that we're having an assessment and it doesn't matter whether it's observation or whether it's written or whatever, they will see the whole thing as an actual test [and] they will still call it a test (GT1).

The other said:

> Teachers have said they do want to change it [the assessment] but when it has come to the crunch and they look at it, they have found it pretty hard to change (DT2).

Other teachers understood the NQF not as a shift to new forms of assessment so much as an increase in the frequency of assessment.

> NZQA expect the assessments to be very little different from 6th Form Certificate type assessments, just smaller. The philosophy of the unit standards is that assessment should be closer to the learning instead of the whole unit of work in giving a topic test at the end of it. You give little tests throughout the whole topic instead (FT1).

Reassessment—or Resitting?

According to Hall and McKeown's (1996) report on a year-long implementation trial of unit standards in secondary schools, a significant feature of the unit standard system in practice is its provision for students who fail to achieve a unit standard to be reassessed at a later stage in the course. Reassessment itself is not a new practice in education, but under the unit standards system, re-assessment comes as a right. Reassessment is explained as a process of collecting evidence rather than an episode.

> As evidence is collected, you can identify aspects of performance that are not up to standard and continue to collect evidence as the learner improves. In this sense, reassessment is simply the continued collection of further evidence in the normal way—suitable occasions are chosen or tasks created. . . . There are obvious limitations on how you and your institution can arrange to continue to accept further evidence (NZQA, 1996, p. 38).

> Assessment involves ongoing evidence-based judgements which must be consistent 'although the approach used minimises any need to stress re-assessment' (Undated, p. 13). If learners fully understand the process, they can volunteer evidence of their abilities (NZQA, 1996, p. 39).

One teacher thought students always knew what was going on and that they responded to that information.

> With the unit standards, the kids always know what the observation is going to be. There would be a check list. So say in the computer area, they're checking on health and safety issues [in relation to computers], every hour students get up and they take a rest from the screens. They do eye exercises—and that's what they have to do. There would be a tick

> sheet that is ticked off as the children are observed. Teachers have a tick sheet. Kids have to know in advance what they have been tested for otherwise it is pointless testing for anything (GT1).

Reassessment, however, is not the term used by students nor by all teachers; some talked of "resubmissions".

> The school does not have a written policy on resubmission. The way it worked out is that each department is deciding its own policy on resubmission. Last year just about everybody allowed their students to resubmit. It seems that they would be given back their test paper and it would be indicated to them which PC [performance criteria] they had not got and then they would be invited to find an error in their answer which may lead to them getting the PC (FT1).

"Resit" was the term used by students rather than resubmission or reassessment. Yet the very idea of a resit is problematic in terms of an evidence-based approach as outlined by the NZQA (1996, p. 38). Again, the students' use of "resits" points to their prevailing perception of the new assessments in terms of the old, in terms of tests. Indeed, the reassessments were described as written tests.

> What happens with the re-sit? [Interviewer]. We had to *write* the answers (D7).

Some students felt motivated by the idea of a resit.

> I only know that if you have tests and you fail you can just do them again until you pass. It encourages people because if they fail they say I'm going to try harder. There are second chances and that's really good for some people (B5).

The next student was typical of many who preferred examinations.

> If you fail, you get nothing at all. You get another chance. If you fail that, you get nothing at all. But if you do an exam, you get a percentage—you get something. With an exam you get 15 percent, 20 percent, but with unit standards it is different, you don't get anything (A3).

Several students were able to respond to questioning about the "problem" of the [performance] criteria. Students referred to the performance criteria as the "criteria".

> She said I didn't explain it with enough depth (F7). But how would you know what is enough depth? [Interviewer]. You don't (F7).

> We had to write a report and part of that was that it had to have a title and I did my title except it was not underlined so I didn't get that mark so when I got it back I just got my ruler and underlined it—and I got it (F7).

> You don't get to look at the examination but you get a copy of the unit standards test. It is up on the wall and you can look at that and you can see exactly what is there (A4).

Depending on the school and the particular needs of students, a unit standard could be reassessed between one and an unlimited number of times. Teachers reported there were time limits in practice.

> Every student should be offered at least one reassessment opportunity. There is no upper limit. But there is an informal but not stated policy that if you want to offer more than one then you really give yourself work. That is not part of the policy and in fact it is really up to the teacher concerned. The way it worked out is that each department is deciding its own policy on resubmission and last year just about everybody allowed their students to resubmit but we will not be repeating that . . . it was an absolute nightmare. Because every single student was different from every other and it just took up so much time and delayed students getting their results back. It was more trouble than it was worth (FT1).

Students were asked why there were variations in the number of times unit standards were able to be reassessed. One student thought the differences in the number of reassessments between subjects was unfair as "it gave the lazy ones more chances" (C2). Another said:

> I don't really take them [resits] seriously. Other people like to concentrate more on sixth form certificate and when they have chances to do reassessments they come in at lunch time. It takes up a lot of time. Sometimes we have to do it in our spare time (E2).

> I didn't get it the first time but I got it in the end but that was because I reassessed it doing something else (F7).

If students continue to see the new forms of assessment as tests, and see reassessment as resiting, then the problem identified by Hall and McKeown (1996) is particularly pertinent.

> It is anticipated that . . . managing the re-assessment demands will become a key issue that calls into question both the right of students to continue to be re-assessed on a standard which they failed to achieve on a number of previous occasions, and the extent to which an individual should be permitted to proceed in a programme while pre-requisite competencies have not been achieved (p. 141).

Theoretically, there is no time requirement for the completion of unit standards. But the Student Allowances Regulations (Ministry of Education, 1996) state that students must pass more than half of a recognised programme to retain their eligibility for allowances. Institutions whose students receive allowances do not, as yet, include schools. However, there is an inherent contradiction.

Dual Assessment

> There weren't separate tests. They are done on the same page (F7).

Many students reported that their assessment consisted of unit standards combined with sixth form assessments. Assessment consisted mainly of tests with a dual marking system for each question—one for unit standards assessment and one for sixth form assessment. This resulted in some students being given a pass in their sixth form certificate assessment while at the same time failing the elements for the unit standard on the same questions. These students did not gain any unit standards. In 2 schools the number of performance criteria "passed" were added and the total given as a percentage to individual students as the mark for their sixth form assessment whether or not they passed their unit standards.

The information about the dual assessment was obtained early in the interviews so all students were subsequently questioned about this aspect of assessment. Several students expressed a strong dislike for these situations.

> Unit standards are quite specific in what you have to do. You have to know a lot more and it takes a lot more work to pass it. Because of internal assessment we had quite a few. For internal assessment they all put it during one time in the year like at the end of the first term or the end of the second term. Then they throw in the unit standards as well (F5).

> While you are doing your exam for a sixth form certificate you are also doing your assessment on the same piece of paper. That is why it gets you confused. When you get results back you might have passed in the exam but in units standards there are some you didn't get. I might get 60 percent and then I hadn't got the unit standard because I failed one element (E4).

One student revealed the reason that her school "threw in" unit standards with sixth form assessments to make what some teachers called dual assessments.

> There were only five people in the class who turned up for the unit standards so they mixed them together (E1).

There were positive views of unit standards because of resits.

> With something like School Certificate, if you fail that you have to come back and do a whole year whereas in a unit standard you just sit it again until you get it (B3).

There were negative views because students would fail, even though they came close, and did not get a grade.

> Unit standards have become really like 99 percent of getting it and you get one wrong and you haven't got it. Whereas sixth form internal assessment shows you exactly what you've got (F6).

> My biology teacher just keeps on complaining about how many people have hardly got any unit standards. They leave 5 percent off and they get it all wrong (E1).

One teacher said:

> All this sort of nonsense goes on. Dual assessment kills everything. It just crucifies teachers. You give them unit standards and you mark it one way and you mark it the other way and you do get contradictions. The moment you have got dual assessment you have got work for teachers and it just drives them nuts and makes it very difficult for them. Some people are ludicrously conscientious. I just said to the guy, no stuff it. I am not doing assessment at 12 o'clock at night. I have got a wife and two kids and we are entitled to a life outside of teaching (DT1).

The Amount of Assessment

> . . . you can reduce time spent on assessment and make assessment activities complement and reinforce learning. Careful planning can minimise assessment occasions and provide for a more holistic approach (NZQA, 1996, p. 36).

> Integrated assessment can go even further. . . . you [can] design a single learning or assessment activity that will provide assessment evidence for more than one unit standard . . . (NZQA, 1996, p. 36).

That integration, however, is rare. When a principal from one of the research schools was interviewed about the additional work that has been imposed on teachers by the recent addition of unit standards, she said she wanted the teachers to:

- analyse the curriculum on a table (matrix) and mark the elements that occur in more than one intersection between different curriculum areas; and
- prioritise the pedagogical attention that these elements require on the basis of the attention already paid to them differentially across the whole school curriculum.

The principal thought that computerisation of courses would eventually ease the workload. She also expressed concern about the teachers' reluctance to accept a flexible, multidisciplinary approach to education. She thought this was a limitation brought about because of their specialisation within particular disciplines. She said that at a recent meeting of the school's board of studies, a group of senior teachers found it difficult to see her point of view and argued instead for the value of their disciplines as opposed to a multidisciplinary approach to the curriculum. She said that as most teachers were educated in a particular discipline, they identified themselves with that disciplinary knowledge.

Research into NQF trials in schools (Hall & Keown, 1996) finds that:

> The requirements for the teachers to justify their judgements about student mastery caused them to believe early in the process that the best evidence would be written, and gathered formally. As a result, short assessment tasks, tests and some project work tended to be the order of the day and many teachers noted the effect on students. However, it is probably more accurate to regard the problem as one of over-testing, rather than over-assessment because later in the year, evidence was gathered in a greater variety of ways and particular students targeted for further evidence. . . . In that same study, 54

> percent of students said the amount of assessment was about right, 27 percent felt they were assessed too frequently, and 15 percent thought there was not enough. 'It was the researcher's interpretation that the latter group was probably from classrooms where the unit standards had been accorded a very low priority' (p. 131).

About half of the students interviewed expressed concern about the extra work involved in dual assessment.

> It's quite hard because it all clashes sometimes because you're studying for one thing and then you have to worry about the other one. There wasn't enough time to study for the sixth form one because the unit standards took up a lot of time in our class time. After a while I sort of gave up. Not many people like it, they just say it's a waste of time. It clashes with their internal assessment and it throws it all out of balance (F5).

> You have got your normal sixth form assessment and then on top of that there is extra work for unit standards. When you have to concentrate on two things, it is a bit difficult. We only concentrate on the sixth form so when it comes to unit standards we just do it but not with so much effort. That is because sixth form at the moment is more important than unit standards because unit standards isn't in fully. We have been told that a lot of universities and polytechs and jobs know more about sixth form certificates than unit standards (E6).

> It's a bit crazy. We will get four assessments at one time and it is really hard when you have got unit standards and you have the two things and it is really confusing to most people (E1).

Different criteria are being used to assess unit standards and sixth form assessment respectively. This is to be expected as the 2 assessment systems have different philosophical bases—achievement-based, and competency-based assessment. But these differences seemed unfair to some students.

> My writing lacked impact. With that [lack of impact], you might get it right for sixth form but because it is not good enough for unit standards you could fail it for the unit standards (E6).

The conditions surrounding "resits" have been commented on in New Zealand.

> . . . some teachers used oral probing of student explanations as a basis for re-assessment and others allowed students to re-work portions of formal tasks in order to make their understandings more explicit. These measures became known within the *Sufficiency Project* as the 'fix-up/re-do' approach . . . the students as well as the teachers were of the opinion that to focus on them in this way was fair, given the constraints of time in class . . . (Hall & Keown, 1996, p. 133).

Sufficiency of Evidence

"Most concerns about standards-based assessment come down to sufficiency" (NZQA, 1996, p. 55) which is:

> the collection of a suitable range of evidence . . . a mix of methods such as the following be used for providing evidence: direct observation of activities, skills/work sample tests, projects/assignments, evidence from prior learning, log books, records of achievement/ portfolios (Barker, 1995, p. 28).

Gonczi (as cited in Barker, 1995, p. 29) calls this approach "performance assessment", defining it as the action of assembling data by methodical means for making decisions about the learner. Gonczi notes that there are advantages in this mode of assessment, when:

> the methods are directly faithful to the performances being assessed, due regard is given to both the product and process in performance, performance provides evidence of knowledge and attitudes, and integrated assessments are used to cover multiple elements (Barker, 1995, p. 29).

Barker (1995, p. 30) points out that some professions have already moved in this direction and that, for teachers (and others), these changes in assessment represent a revolution in the way learning is viewed. To ensure that the assessment evidence gathered is sufficient to give the assessor confidence that the learner has met all the requirements, the NZQA suggests assessors consider:

> the length of time after the performance has been learned and practised; the skill or knowledge sometimes needs to be demonstrated more than once; skills or knowledge have to be demonstrated in different contexts; the range statements in the unit standards outline the requirements; negative evidence (evidence that the learner cannot perform the standard) must be considered; the relationship between piecemeal collection of evidence and a coherent performance . . . teachers should plan to provide learners with ample opportunity to demonstrate what they can do; learners should be able to volunteer evidence. A tight assessment plan that relies on only formal tests for evidence will probably generate sufficiency problems (NZQA, 1996, pp. 44–45).

If this overview of expectations and requirements of sufficiency of evidence is mapped on to student responses indicating that the major part of their assessment is done through tests, it would seem that in these early days of the new system, insufficient evidence of their performance is being collected. Most students felt assessment was "done" to them rather than being something for which they volunteered evidence:

> We just did a task and then he told us which ones we had gained and then ticked them off on the sheet and that's all we knew. I think he might have said something about we are going to do part of unit standard or something. Then later on we didn't even know if we needed them. We didn't do any more after that (G2).

> We had to show him if we could do it or not and he marked us off. And then he told us what we had done wrong so we could study up and do those bits again (G7).

> I might have had one for workshops. We did a safety course thing and that gave us some marks. I wasn't sure what happened. You might fluke it. You might get everything. When it is finished and you are thinking about it you might say I just guessed all that and I actually got it right but I guessed. I could get it totally wrong as well (B5).

Student responses, in general, do not show any evidence of them knowing about "sufficiency of evidence" as an assessment concept. It seems unlikely then that they understand the need to "volunteer evidence" (NZQA, 1996, p. 45) to a level where, ideally, they should demonstrate a level of responsibility and become partners in the process of their own assessment.

Defensibility of Standards

Statements from students such as "he helped us with the ones that we got wrong, it helped us quite a bit", "somehow nearly everyone passes in that subject", "there are second chances", "you can just do them again until you pass", "whereas a unit standard you just sit it again until you get it", indicate that the conditions under which reassessment takes place are not standardised in terms of the initial assessment between schools, between years, with each assessment, or reassessment. There are arguably different conditions for the resits from those pertaining at the first assessment and therefore the assessments may be not standardised. Their validity and reliability may be contested.

> . . . the lack of standardisation represented by the differential conditions may result in students meeting substantially different standards in an environment in which officials claim that they are all meeting the same standard (Phillips, 1996, p. 8).

Any lack of consistency in assessment procedures raises doubts about the reliability and validity of the standards, and may leave providers vulnerable to litigation. The fact that assessment is based on registered statements of standards may in itself be no protection from litigation. Litigation has already been hinted at as a remedy.

> Students . . . find themselves in a user pays environment, and this is likely to intensify. Students are consumers of services and now have all the rights of the Consumer Guarantees Act. As well as the learning they contract to purchase, they are able to have the standards of the qualifications defined (NZQA, undated, p. 9).

This statement raises the spectre of litigation when there are non-standardised assessment conditions in a contractual environment.

It has recently been argued by Tuck (1995), that standards-based assessment is a complex issue as "important educational objectives and their associated learning and assessment tasks and standards of performance are complex and influenced by context" (p. 68). The theme of this chapter is that standards-based assessment seems straightforward but in fact is deceptively complex. The evidence points to:

- conditions that ensure standardisation of assessment and avoid the possibility of litigation;
- dual assessments which increase student and teacher workload and worry students;
- a lack of understanding in the minds of teachers about integration of assessment;
- relatively little cultural change in schools that would be required to ensure success of assessment; and
- a lack of practices that would ensure sufficiency of evidence.

This is illustrated most dramatically by the testimony of students about the volume of written testing in relation to other possible new assessment tasks.

A REDEFINED ROLE FOR TEACHERS?

> *If you are a teacher . . . in an accredited teaching institution, you . . . are a registered assessor* (NZQA, 1996, p. 1).

There was little sign amongst students of teacher enthusiasm for the unit standards, largely because of the extra work associated with them. Several students stated that teachers did not understand the "system" very well. One student said that teachers who did not understand had a "moaning" attitude. Another said "teachers should explain more—but I guess they are busy" (A2).

> Obviously the teachers don't want to talk it through in every class, but not that they would tell us that. They have only been offered to us in the forestry—one where there is only a few people in the class, but he made it sound like that it was an option for everyone. But I assume that other teachers keep it quiet, otherwise they'll be bringing themselves into something they don't want (G1).

> Some teachers like it [unit standards] and some don't. The teachers who do, they just like to stick with the sixth form assessment so that people once they fail, teachers say oh well they failed. They should have worked harder—you know how some teachers think (D5).

> I think probably the teachers don't know so much about it. I think they are learning a little bit more now but I think they thought it was a bother doing both especially when they didn't understand.

> He said they were a lot of work for the teachers. He just said there are a lot of meetings and stuff (G4).

> Teachers are going to try and cross credit things, so by doing your normal sixth form work, you would be able to gain unit standards at the same time. But they gave it up I think because of the work and you know they want a pay rise, and those were one of things they dropped because of that (G1).

Of half the 10 teachers spoken to, 5 felt negative about the NQF:

> It has come at a very bad time in terms of teaching. Pay is low, morale is not very good and they don't want to work hard at the moment. I think they secretly quite like examination system because it is simplistic and easy to deal with (BT2).

Other teachers saw the NQF as a positive move:

> I can see it working for maths. I think it would be brilliant in that area especially for your lower achievers because they can achieve at their level and the others can carry on (GT1).

> You've got to be prepared to teach at different levels all the time in your classroom. That's the bottom line and I think we can probably do that quite well in an area we work at but others would find that quite difficult because they might have three or four different levels (GT1).

Another teacher explained the changes in record keeping which had improved because the number of things requiring recording had decreased.

> Originally NZQA wanted us to record by performance criteria and then they said they actually only really wanted us to record by element. Now they are saying even if we don't record by element as long as we record by unit standard and so suddenly your recording system has gone down from 10 to 1 (AT1).

One teacher noted the change in attitude required from students.

> If they had a punctuation mark in the wrong place, they failed. Yet it is an eye opener for them because if they miss that comma, they don't pass. So yes it is quite different for them (GT1).

In relation to work load, another teacher said:

> We don't actually worry about sufficiency with regard to examinations so why is there all of a sudden this huge worry about sufficiency with unit standards (FT1).

This last statement suggests an almost complete lack of understanding of the "new" approach to assessment—teachers are still working in terms of tests. If language is integral to culture, we might say that in this case, the school culture has not, as yet, changed.

STUDENT FUTURES

> *Investment in the upskilling of New Zealand's adult population will become of greater importance as older age groups increase in size, and as the rate of growth of participation in tertiary education and training by school leavers slows* (Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 28).

Students Looking to Employment

With the advent of the NQF, the education and training descriptors "vocational", "professional", and "industrial", have become employment related. As a result, the boundaries between education and work have become blurred. The aim of the NQF is to increase choices for learners in this new "world definition" by providing for career and learning pathways by means of skills for careers and on-the-job learning. Hood *et al.* (1996) define the features of the NQF that will affect the futures of individual learners as:

> access to a broader range of quality-assured qualifications, increased opportunities for cross crediting, and a consistent way of describing competencies achieved (p. 1).

The way the NQF is structured then, ought to send signals to students about lifelong learning and that school-based learning is but a pathway to further learning and lifelong qualifications. That is a trajectory for future movement—the path has been mapped and semi-paved. In this sense, school, for students, is primarily instrumental to their future employment.

A recent NZQA publication states that it is the responsibility of:

> every school . . . to explore the vision that is inherent in the Qualifications Framework and to understand the potential it offers. It is the responsibility of the school to create programmes that suit the needs of their learners (Martin, 1993, p. 13).

When asked about the ways in which unit standards would influence their future in education and work, many students were confused:

> I'm not sure on this sort of stuff. I think that it's to do with tertiary education (B4).

> It is been brought in half way through school and we haven't been given much information. If a teacher sat down and explained it properly you would get a full idea and would have a complete understanding of what you are doing. Maybe for the younger

generation that are coming up, if they are brought into it, they will understand (E4).

At the moment I don't know whether I should be doing a biology paper at University or tourism and I don't know what subjects to take or what marks I should get. I don't know anything about that and I want to know about that and what kinds of job opportunities there are for me if I do take a certain course when I get out of university. I am not speaking from personal experience but from what I have heard. They don't tell you that sort of thing (F7).

It seems weird that we have not been told much about it. At school we have heard about unit standards, etc., but we haven't really been given any details or explanations (B3).

My teacher tells us about it a lot but we just go 'oh yeah, that's cool' (C3).

A few students thought that existing qualifications are more real for employers. They are thinking of what matters to employers in terms of how they can present themselves to them.

You have just got this one way street where all they [employers] know is that sixth form is the most important so that is all they are going to take notice of (E6).

Employers would probably take more notice of the exam results because that's a once off thing. You don't get a [second] chance (D2).

At the moment I would think they would look at sixth form certificate because not everyone has got unit standards (F4).

If they don't know anything about the unit standards, then they'll go by the exam results (C1).

It is a fact of life that they are still looking at your 5th form, 6th form, or mainly 7th form marks. I don't know how up to date employers are with the education system and how many people actually know about these things. Obviously it is only new this year so I don't see why employers would be looking out for new sorts of assessments and qualifications (F3).

A few thought the unit standards would give a better impression of themselves.

I would think employers would take notice of the unit standards because they're widely publicised and there are so many different things you get them in (G1).

They [unit standards] will provide future employers with information about your skills and what you know, and so you have got more chance of getting a job (B3).

If another person has the same qualifications as me but has not done unit standards, I would probably be taken in before them (B6).

If students are going to give unit standards more weight, then research on whether employers take more note of unit standards results rather than examinations is advisable.

Students Looking to University

Many students said they were going to a tertiary education institution after the seventh form and did not display much interest in questions about what employers would think—that day was probably too far away.

> Because we will go off to university. This unit standards is really new, most people only understand things like Sixth Form Certificate. I don't think anyone will pay attention (E1).

> I could take them a whole lot of credits but they might not understand what they mean. If I took them a sixth form grade they would know I was either good or bad at the subject. They would know what I was talking about (E6).

Over all, however, students were uncertain about their futures and gave widely sweeping ideas—even those who said they were "sure" they were going to enter a profession.

> I would like an 'A' bursary. I might do a BA, maybe go to art school, that is a possibility, but I don't think so. I would say a general arts degree. Maybe psychiatry or criminal psychologist would be very interesting (E1).

> I have to know what direction I'm going in by now as it is nearly the end of the 6th form. So I have to enrol in something. I'm going to stay on next year and do 7th form so I have got more time. I will have to figure it out but it is not that easy because you are limited as to the choices. If you wanted to go into social science, I would need maths and I'm not good at maths but I am good at other things. I'm quite fussy as to what I like and don't like. A lot of the jobs that are out there I am just not interested in and I don't want to study for them (B6).

> I am working hard overall and getting good marks but the main problem I have is deciding what [I will do] (B6).

> I didn't actually intend to go to university. I am not actually sure what is going to happen yet. I am going to stick to human biology to be a vet (veterinarian) or maybe even a professional coach of ice hockey (B5).

Students in the United States

These students' ideas correlate with the research findings in the United States in the *Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development*, which is a longitudinal study of how young people think about careers and work, and in which Olson (1996) writes about a similar experience of a student who said "maybe I'll be an athlete, maybe I'll be a neuro-surgeon. Maybe I'll be a model" (p. 32). Olson also suggests that "teenagers have wildly high expectations about the future" (p. 31). When they

mapped the world of work on to the aspirations of students, there was very little coverage of the world of work contained in the student aspirations.

> Ten percent expect to be doctors, and about one in three expects to have a professional career. Most expect to do work that is high-status and highly paid. Few imagine themselves working in blue-collar, service or craft industries (Olson, 1996, p. 32).

The researchers argue that schools need to provide better information to young people about the knowledge and skills required for a broad range of occupations and work to integrate that information into the regular curriculum (Olson, 1996, p. 32).

Information Alone Is Not Enough

The very architecture of the NQF is designed to provide market signals to help students propel themselves into the world of work and learning.

> The National Qualifications Framework does not contain one single secondary school qualification. The National Certificates available to teenagers in schools provide tertiary qualifications. A few of these certificates can be completed at school but many require further education or training either through higher institutions or in the work place. This will send a clear signal to young people that school-based learning is a pathway to further learning and lifelong qualifications (Hood, 1996, p. 183).

But the mere provision of information may not be enough.

> The mind cannot be divorced from the social context in which it is formed. It is not merely that rationality is bounded by social contexts, rather social contexts provide shared perspectives, norms, and goals for negotiating the world which cannot be reduced to this model of instrumental rationality (Lauder, Hughes, Dupuis, & McGlin, 1992, p. 4).

Students' decision making and thoughts about their future education and work are not based on the provision of information alone—important as that is—but are context dependent. This means students' decisions and ideas will be linked to, and formed by, such things as school cultures, media influence, family background, social class, and gender.

On the basis of information obtained from the interviews for the first phase of the study, it is clear that the NZQA's provision of information to schools, and schools' provision of information about the NQF to their students, has yet to result in student understanding of the NQF. Students are, as yet, unable to translate what information they do have into knowledge of the kind which would enable them to use the NQF to make rational choices for their future.

Careers Advice

In the interviews students were asked about careers guidance in their schools and about Careers New Zealand, ETSA, and the New Zealand Employment Service. No student had heard of ETSA or Careers New Zealand. Most had heard of the Employment Service as being "those people who

get you a job when you don't have one"—but that, for them, was in the future. A few students said that careers guidance teachers provided information, but when asked few students could remember the name of the careers guidance person. About another third said they could identify her or him but could not remember the name. Although some students said careers teachers spoke regularly at school assemblies about "the qualifications", the students could not recall what had actually been said. Since attendance at assemblies is compulsory, it could be expected that most students would have been presented with the information at some time. Careers guidance teachers seemed to have little to do with student choices of study. It was also clear that what students did know had often been supplied classroom teachers.

Over all, students reported little experience of the careers guidance system in their schools. This fits with the observation that "careers work has not occupied a large amount of the counsellor's time" (Miller, Manthei, & Gilmore, 1993, p. 108). The same is also true in the United States where a multistate survey of public high schools revealed:

> general unfamiliarity among principals and counsellors with national workforce preparation policies as represented by . . . a lack of commitment to career development program outcomes for all student groups, particularly those at risk of dropping out; uneven delivery of services, with least attention of cultural diversity outcomes; and underutilization of counsellors. [There are] historical and cultural forces operating for and against sustained efforts in workforce preparation programs (Bloch, 1996, p. 20).

Further research will be needed to identify these forces in New Zealand.

The NQF—Where Now?

The NQF is designed to bridge the worlds of work, school, and higher education and, most importantly, to motivate and enthuse students, teachers, tutors, parents, and employers alike (Hood, 1995, p. 2). In terms of student futures, the NQF is designed to provide a structure that develops learning that is relevant and responsive to the needs of the learners, industries, and professions and provides a variety of clear pathways for people to gain qualifications. The way to do this is to:

> increase the effectiveness of learning by making it learner centred (shaped by individual starting points, needs, purposes, prior learning, preferred learning styles, pace, modes of learning, location for learning (Martin, 1993, p. 9).

For the NQF to be fully implemented, there will need to be legislative, structural, cultural, and practical changes for schools and teachers. There has to be a change away from subject-based teaching, away from the custodial function of secondary schools, and towards a learning environment.

Finally, such change will require the co-operation of teachers and parents and that will require further research to establish what they need in order to make such changes.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM THE STUDY

1. If students and teachers are to become committed to the NQF, the dual assessment system cannot continue. The continuance of the 2 systems means that teachers continue to think in terms of the old system of subject divisions rather than an integrated system. Dual assessment was expressed as a major problem for the teachers interviewed and also caused aggressive responses from several students. While students continue to think that employers want a grade or a mark, they will also want that. Already 2 schools in the study have decided to stop reassessment because of operational difficulties. The policy implication is that the transition from assessment-based testing to unit standards assessment would, therefore, need to be accelerated. Reassessment problems may also be alleviated.

2. Students said teachers were overloaded with work. Teachers themselves said much of this work was increased recording and assessment. A better integration of assessment with curriculum is vital.

3. Many teachers had attended the NZQA's assessment seminars on the NQF, but there was strong evidence from student observations that assessment still consists primarily of testing. This concentration on testing as a proxy for sufficiency of evidence was confirmed by principals, school directors of assessment, senior teachers, and national moderators. It would be useful to establish the reasons why teachers cannot put this new information into practice. That would require research into the barriers teachers see for the implementation of the NQF.

4. The analysis of student responses suggests that teachers need a better knowledge of the key concepts which are inherent in the new assessment system. The new assessment culture incorporates such complicated concepts as "validity", "truth", "criteria", and "standards" whose seeming simplicity is deceptive.

5. There was evidence of a considerable amount of information about the NQF in schools, but the results of the study suggest that very little reaches the students. Most students, however, were interested in the structure of the NQF when it was explained to them. One possibility for reaching students individually without adding to teacher workloads is the production of CD-ROMs, which would be even more valuable if they were designed as a computer game. Such electronic distribution may prove more economical than the current brochure-driven effort. Many thousands of valuable hours of teacher time that is currently put into explanations to students about the NQF could also be allocated to more productive efforts.

6. Parental support is vital to their children's education. Therefore knowledge of what parents think is critical. The indications from this study are that parents know even less than their children. It is currently unclear what the structure is by which parents are to be informed. Because of the importance of this issue, urgent research into parental understanding is recommended.

7. If students are expected to relate the NQF to employment through their choice of school subjects, research is required to find out what use employers make of the NQF when they are hiring staff. This information would then need to be given to students.

8. Careers guidance systems do not impinge much on the thinking of students in the study about the NQF. A fresh look at what could be done to improve careers guidance systems is needed.

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